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SUBJECT: ATLANTIC CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE FEDERAL POLITICAL
SCENE: DIVIDED OPINIONS AND LOTS OF RHETORIC

REF: A. (A) OTTAWA 1507

[1](#)B. (B) OTTAWA 1504

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. Atlantic Canadians are divided on how they see the political situation in Ottawa unfolding. Some are embracing the idea of an opposition coalition. Others are more worried that the political instability is diverting attention away from the bigger issue of how to deal with the current economic crisis.
END SUMMARY.

POLITICAL REACTION

[1](#)2. The Atlantic region's 32 MPs featured prominently in the media on December 1 with their spin on the developments in Ottawa. Conservative heavyweights such as Peter MacKay continued to question the legitimacy of the opposition coalition and called on Nova Scotians to support the Harper government. While it is unclear what influence MacKay's pleas will have on the electorate, it appears he can scratch fellow Nova Scotia Independent MP Bill Casey off his list of would-be supporters. Casey came out on December 1 to say he would vote against the Harper government in the House. At the same time Casey said he would not be endorsing the opposition coalition since he was not part of the discussions leading to its formation and accordingly is unsure of their plans and goals. Other regional MPs such as Liberal Roger Cuzner, who serves as the Liberal party whip in the House, said he was excited by the prospect of a new coalition government but said he was concerned about venturing into what he saw as uncharted constitutional waters.

[1](#)3. At the provincial level, the four Atlantic premiers are being careful not to get drawn into what Tory Premier Williams of Newfoundland-Labrador called a "constitutional issue." Nonetheless, his regional counterparts, Liberal New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham and Tory Premier Rodney MacDonald of Nova Scotia, have expressed their concern that federal politicians need to bring about some stability in government so they can focus on the current economic crisis. Other provincial politicians were not as reticent about expressing their opinions. Premier Williams' Liberal and NDP opposition foes have been quick to endorse the coalition and have gone as far as speculating which of the province's seven MPs might get the nod to sit in the new Liberal-NDP cabinet.

PUBLIC OPINION

[1](#)4. The nascent coalition is getting warm support from regional labor leaders with the Newfoundland-Labrador Federation of Labor

saying its members want to send a message of support by holding a rally later this week in St. John's. Federation president Lana Payne said on December 2 she believes the coalition would put Canadians first and make Parliament work. This is the same message that the Halifax Chronicle Herald said in its December 2 lead editorial. Headlined, "Coalition government appears likely," it commented that if Mr. Harper is unable to run an effective minority government then the "other guys" should have a chance to see what they're prepared to do. However, one of post's academic contacts said he is unsure just how well the "other guys" could manage given that they do not appear to know where they are going and what they will do when they get there.

COMMENT

15. From conversations with post's contacts, it appears Atlantic Canadians believe the Harper government is indeed in a precarious state. One of post's longstanding New Brunswick political pundits commented that despite all the turmoil he still sees the PM hanging onto power. However, it is getting harder to find others so sure in their predictions. For now, the rhetoric continues here in Atlantic Canada as elsewhere in the country with the now familiar comment that Canada is indeed sailing into deep and uncharted waters. END COMMENT.

FOSTER